

## Interagency Committee on Employees with Disabilities

### 2014 Award Recipients

#### Nonprofit Award Co-Recipients

Chicago Zoological Society, Stuart D. Strahl, Ph.D., Northern Illinois recipient

Cochlear Implant Awareness Foundation, Michelle Tjelmeland, Director, Downstate recipient

The **Chicago Zoological Society**, which manages the **Brookfield Zoo**, set a goal to create an inclusive Zoo – a goal towards which extraordinary effort has been made. First, its Zoo Camp for All integrates activities and strategies to benefit campers with disabilities, including noise-cancelling headphones and fidget toys. Next, its Youth Volunteer Corp has about 10% students with disabilities. In the fall of 2013, The Society launched “Family Fun Saturdays at Brookfield Zoo” in partnership with Easter Seals to create inclusion and animal-centric experiences for early learners with autism. Its *Good Works* program engages students from five local high schools in vocational training for students with disabilities at the Zoo. These, and a variety of other programs, make the goal of an inclusive Zoo well within its reach.

The **Cochlear Implant Awareness Foundation**, founded in 2006 with the objective of assisting those who needed cochlear implants, has aided more than 500 families. The foundation also provides recycled equipment to implant recipients. CIAF director Michelle Tjelmeland and her daughter are both deaf and both improved their hearing through cochlear implants. Fundraising is crucial to most nonprofits, and CIAF devised some inventive ways to support its programs. The Foundation opened a retail, home décor store staffed solely by volunteers with proceeds going to the organization. The group also organized 5k and 10k races, an auto auction, and a beer and oyster fest-- all benefiting cochlear implant recipients and their families. The U.S. is known for its volunteer organizations, and here in Illinois, Ms. Tjelmeland identified a need for assistance with cochlear implants and devised a successful strategy to fund necessary services.

#### Media Award

Willowbrook High School, Dan Krause, Principal, and students Addie Maggard, director and Alex Bardesi, production manager, of Willowbrook’s ‘High School Musical Junior’

Willowbrook High School students Alex Bardesi, Production Manager and Addie Maggard, and Director, volunteered throughout the summer to make Willowbrook’s ‘High School Junior’ production an amazing reality. Using the “Penguin Project” model, students with disabilities played all of the leading roles in this production. All the students’ speaking parts were recorded with subtitles, so that students were not required to memorize excessive amounts of lines. The lyrics of songs were displayed on a screen so that the audience could sing along. The following is a YouTube link to a video of one of the students singing in a duet: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSMV5GWomvU>. The production of ‘High School

Musical Jr.' was seen by about 1,400 people in one day. As a follow-up event, the first-ever Willowbrook Academy Awards for the High School Musical Jr. production was held. This was a multimedia production with students all getting Oscar-like awards, and acceptance speeches were given. At some time in the future, all high school musical productions will include students with disabilities, but until that time, Ms. Maggard and Mr. Bardesi deserve an award for inclusion of students with disabilities in performances and activities where they were heretofore excluded.

### **State Agency Award**

**The Illinois Tollway**, Executive Director, Kristi Lafleur, and EEO/AA Officer, Lisa Williams

Over 11% of the Illinois Tollway's staff has disabilities, compared to 7% of state government workforce as a whole. Included in this figure are interns and seasonal workers with disabilities. In FY13, The Illinois Tollway granted 80 accommodations in 2013. The agency found the cost of accommodations to be minimal. The most common adjustment provided was job restructuring to reassign non-essential functions in accommodating employees with limited walking or lifting ability. Other accommodations included modified work schedules, provision of training and equipment, ergonomic chairs, adjustable stools, and accessible parking spaces.

In 2013, the ADA Coordinator provided training to all managers and supervisors regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act. The presentation included the basic principles of the ADA, reasonable accommodations, the interactive process, leaves and reassignments, medical inquiries, discipline, confidentiality of information and commonly-asked questions. Those who were unable to participate in the training were provided ADA materials, and these documents were also posted on the Tollway's Intranet, Crossroads, for ease of access. Information about the ADA is posted in all of the Illinois Tollway buildings and facilities, on the agency's website and on Crossroads. Employees can view and print documents regarding the ADA and accommodation request procedures. The Tollway ADA Office also provides training to agency managers and supervisors as disability-related issues arise, such as employment issues (including anti-harassment/discrimination/retaliation issues, and issues regarding job accommodations; physical access issues (including appropriate dimensions under the IL Accessibility Code, including dimensions for accessible furniture, striping for accessible parking spaces, etc.; and issues regarding the accessibility of information technology under the Illinois Information Technology Accessibility Act (IITAAA); among the dissemination of other disability-related information.

Other special projects implemented by the Tollway include making it easier to request accommodation and providing an accessible service desk in the agency's business center. In October 2013, the Illinois Tollway opened a new Customer Call Center in partnership with The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are blind or Visually Impaired. Staffing the new call center are members of underserved communities, including people who are blind or people with other disabilities and veterans, who have been recruited and trained by The Chicago Lighthouse. As of April 2014, the total number of staff at the call center is 289 – with 29 percent of all employees qualified as disabled or military veterans. Currently, The Chicago Lighthouse has provided 222 staffers, of whom 84 – almost 38 percent – are disabled or are military veterans. Of this total, 61 employees have disabilities. The Tollway and The Chicago Lighthouse are working toward an October 2014 goal of having 50 percent of the workforce consists of employees who have disabilities or are military veterans.

## **Advocate Award**

### **Posthumous award to Dan Dickerson**

It wouldn't take anyone long after meeting Dan Dickerson, who died in the last year, that his life work was advocacy. In fact, the vanity license plate on his car spelled it out: ADVOC8. And he excelled at it. Many of the jobs Dan held since he acquired a disability involved some form of advocacy. One of the ICED members described Dan's work at one of those jobs, "He introduced our office to quantify and evaluate facilities for people with disabilities. He taught us how to use the tools and what to expect if we did our jobs honestly! I've seen many changes in this community and communities throughout the State because of Dan's work. He was a fierce advocate for people with disabilities. We spent lots of times on the road and visited just about every County in the State. He was instrumental in starting the Disability Navigation Program for DCEO [the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity]. Initially he brought in 14 Navigators who were recognized by Department of Labor for doing great works for the Workforce Investment Act Programs in 26 Workforce Areas. There were a total of 120 different sites. The Navigator Program was eventually transferred in total to the City of Chicago Chamber of Commerce under the guidance of "disabilityWorks". Dan affected many positive disability programs and activities in Illinois; though, he did not take or get credit for lots of it!" Most people who knew Dan could tell a story like that and that's why he is being honored today, because he was a fierce advocate who wasn't in it for the glory.

## **State Employee of the Year**

### **David Dailey, Department of Transportation**

David Dailey, who serves as the Illinois Department of Transportation's ADA Coordinator, has worked for the agency more than 20 years. He takes an unusual approach to placing individuals with disabilities in employment opportunities: whatever works. He has a 70% placement rate for finding individuals with disabilities jobs. At IDOT, he created and implemented the Student Professionals with Disabilities. This training program was developed to assist students with disabilities in high school who had no vocational experience in the office setting. Dave has worked with individuals with the most severe disabilities and has been able to improve their work ethic and self-esteem. This program has given students an opportunity to gain some vocational skills that will assist them with future career planning. Mr. Dailey also volunteers his time and expertise on several committees and Commissions, such as the Coalition Citizens with Disabilities, Illinois Planning Committee, and the Springfield Disability Commission. Dave worked for several different state agencies, including the Department of Central Management Services and the Secretary of State's Office. The DHS Division of Rehabilitation Services' Springfield Field office has a very high number of customers who credit Dave with creating another choice for students to obtain training that will lead to a successful job placement. Dave has a good working relationship with all the DRS field counselors that contribute to the high percentage of job placement.

## **Legislator of the Year**

### **Representative Esther Golar**

Esther Golar was first elected as State Representative on November 7th, 2006 and served continually in the legislature since that time. During that time, she demonstrated the commitment to make a difference on behalf of everyone in her legislative district and the State of Illinois. Representative Golar attended Malcolm X College, Chicago, is a member of Alternative Policing Strategy, Robert Fulton Elementary Local School Council (1999-2006), and the Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago, Inc. She received the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Leadership Award. Representative Golar is an advocate to improve education, reduce crime, bring jobs to Illinois and make healthcare available to all. She serves on the Appropriations-Human Services, Elementary and Secondary Education, Housing, and Public Utilities Committees in the legislature. A disability advocate, she sponsored the Employment First Act, which ensures that people with intellectual disabilities will be considered for competitive employment. She also sponsored a bill at ICED's request to increase its membership to include the Constitutional Officers and the Council on Developmental Disabilities.

### **Agency Participation in SD Program**

As participation in the Successful Disability Opportunities program is voluntary, ICED recognizes the following agencies for their commitment to use the SD program to further affirmative action for people with disabilities in state government in calendar year 2013.

- Illinois Gaming Board
- Department of Healthcare and Family Services
- Department of Human Services
- Department of Natural Resources
- Department of Public Health
- Illinois State Police
- Department of Revenue
- Department of Veterans' Affairs